

## UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE) FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

*By*

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### **Abstract**

This work explored universal basic education for sustainable national development in Nigeria. Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunities by Sherman and Wood (1982) and Human Capital Theory by Becker (1962) served as theoretical roadmaps for this review. An objective was raised to guide this survey. This work seeks to provide complimentary, compulsory basic education for all Nigerian children of school age which promotes sustainable national development by creating opportunities that enable children and communities to achieve their aspirations and maximise their potential over time. It further showed that UBE mitigates educational disparity by providing free and compulsory education, so affording every child access to learning opportunities. A decrease in inequality levels facilitates the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 10, which emphasise Gender Equality and the mitigation of disparities. It was concluded that universal basic education

(UBE), which provides foundational education to meet individuals' minimum learning requirements, is essential for sustainable national growth. It was therefore recommended among others that the Government should regularly send quality assurance officers to various schools to ensure that the UBE programme is properly implemented; and should also ensure that funds are given to the programme to ensure that the programme does not suffer any limitation or setbacks due to inadequacy of funds for successful running of the programme for better sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Universal Basic Education, Development, Sustainable National Development

### **1. Introduction**

Sustainable national development focusses on improving individuals within the economy while simultaneously fostering national progress, ensuring that such development is viable over time (Ojinga,

2017). Munasinghe (2004, as cited in Abubakar, 2013) asserts that sustainable national development is a process aimed at enhancing the array of opportunities that empower individuals and communities to realise their aspirations and full potential over an extended duration, while preserving the resilience of economic, social, and environmental systems. Sustainable national development in Nigeria necessitates a significant emphasis on education, particularly basic education for all inhabitants.

In Nigeria, many educational programmes are advancing for the enhancement of human capital. One of these programmes is the Universal Primary Education (UPE), which has evolved into the Universal Basic Education (UBE). The Universal Basic Education seeks to deliver mandatory fundamental education to the populace. It is anticipated to deliver fundamental education that is conclusive (Adewole, 2003, as cited in Ibeh and Nwosu, 2021). The UBE programme introduced nomadic education, education for migrant fishermen, initiatives for school dropouts, and adult education (Ibeh and Nwosu, 2021). This fundamental level of education is considered the foundational step that will direct and influence the progression of

learners to higher tiers of the educational system (Gideon, 2021). The fundamental objectives of UBE are to establish a foundation for lifelong learning for all segments of the population, regardless of their life circumstances (Nwankwo, 2010).

Universal Basic Education (UBE) facilitates the dissemination of essential knowledge across all segments of Nigerian society from one generation to the next (Eddy and Akpan, 2009, as cited in Gideon, 2021). This form of education enables individuals to operate efficiently within society. At this juncture, pupils possess the utmost capacity to instigate significant and beneficial transformations in their lives. Nigeria requires, in the 21st century, not prolonged primary education, but a fundamental education programme that guarantees all graduates possess the requisite knowledge, skills, and experience for initial entry into any profession in the labour market. Oni (2008, as cited in Gideon, 2021) posits that the efficacy of the entire education system hinges on the effectiveness of basic education. This indicates that all civilisations necessitate a functional basic education system for an efficient educational framework and sustainable national growth. Therefore, the specific objective of this review is to underscore the significance of

Universal Basic Education in the Sustainable National Development of Nigeria.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

#### **Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunities by Sherman and Wood (1982)**

Classical liberal theory of equal opportunities was advocated by Sherman and Wood in 1982 who advance the perspective of the need for equal opportunities in education for every learner (Sherman & Wood, 1982). The theory affirms that every learner is born having some amount of ability which to some bigger margin is congenital and cannot be substantively altered. Therefore, education systems and structures ought to be organized in a manner that removes challenges of any form (social, economic, political, geographic, gender, location, and etcetera) that prevent ingenious learners from lesser economic upbringings from taking full gain of their innate talents, which fast-track them to social promotion. The education delivered to marginalized and vulnerable students would accelerate them to social promotion as education is a great equalizer (Areba, 2020; Sherman & Wood, 1982). The classical liberal theory of equal opportunities is relevant in that it renders support to the provision of universal basic

education (UBE) on maximising the innate abilities in individuals which aid sustainable development of any nation. Thus, by eliminating fees, the government has removed some economic barriers or divides between rich and the poor thereby giving everyone especially children access to basic education as they are able to build their innate abilities and talents and attain academic success needed for sustainable growth and development.

#### **Human Capital Theory by Becker (1962)**

Human capital theory posits that the amalgamation of individuals' knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences, collectively termed as human capital, serves as valuable assets that augment their productivity and foster sustainable development in a nation over time (Becker, 1962). Stemming from the acknowledgment that investments in education such as UBE, training, and health not only benefit individuals' welfare but also foster economic growth and societal advancement, the theory underscores the significance of education and skill development in augmenting sustainable development such as economic productivity and well-being (Widarni and Bawono, 2021; Zhang and Wang, 2021). Thus, individuals with heightened human capital, characterized by cognitive abilities, critical thinking, and

problem-solving skills acquired through education (such as UBE) and training will be better positioned to contribute to the sustainability of their society (Handayani and Sasongko, 2021). This theory is relevant in that it emphasises the importance of investing in basic education and training, as these investments can impact sustainable growth and development and the individuals' well-being.

### **Development**

Development is characterised as an evolutionary process wherein human capability expands through the initiation of new structures, problem-solving, adaptation to ongoing change, and the purposeful and creative pursuit of new objectives (Peet, 1999, as cited in Mensah, 2019). Reyes (2001, as cited in Mensah, 2019) defines development as a societal condition inside a nation where the population's demands are met through the logical and sustainable utilisation of natural resources and systems. Todaro and Smith (2006, as cited in Mensah, 2019), characterised development as a multi-faceted process encompassing significant transformations in social structures, attitudes, and institutions, alongside economic growth, the mitigation of inequality, and the elimination of absolute poverty. Naomi (1995, as cited in Lawal and Oluwatoyin,

2011) posits that development encompasses not only economic growth but also equitable distribution, healthcare provision, education, housing, and other essential services, all aimed at enhancing both individual and collective quality of life.

Development involves both qualitative and quantitative enhancement of individuals' capacities, skills, creativity, and overall material welfare (Oye-Adeniyi, 2014). Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013) contend that development is the process of empowering individuals to realise their potential and use natural resources to satisfy daily human need. It can also be viewed as a process that significantly enhances the quality of human life and the ability to meet everyday demands. Chrisman (1984, as cited in Oye-Adeniyi, 2014), defines development as a process of societal progress, wherein enhancements in the well-being of individuals are facilitated through robust collaborations throughout all sectors, business entities, and other societal groupings. Development is not merely an economic endeavour; it encompasses socio-economic and political dimensions and permeates all facets of societal existence.

### **National Development**

Adoyi (2006, as cited William and Omamor, 2024) asserts that national

development constitutes a transformation of conditions or circumstances within a certain nation towards improvement. It signifies favourable transformations or enhancements in certain or all facets of a nation's existence. Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) define it as the comprehensive development or a collective socio-economic, political, and religious progression of a nation like Nigeria. Idike (1992, as cited in Nwapi, 2018) asserts that national development entails the material well-being of the majority of citizens, the assurance of life and property security, and a reduction in levels of inequality within a nation.

Okeke and Idike (2016, as cited in Adagbabiri and Okolie, 2019) assert that national development pertains to the eradication of inter-ethnic animosities and conflicts within inter-group and interpersonal interactions in a nation. It encompasses the gradual alterations and evolution in the social, economic, political, demographic, scientific, ecological, and technical aspects of a nation. It entails sustainable enhancement of both the material and spiritual aspects of a nation, as well as the consolidation of national resources for the collective welfare of citizens in economic, social, political, and technical progress (Adagbabiri and Okolie, 2019). Balogun (1972, as cited in Adagbabiri

and Okolie, 2019) contends that national development involves the enhancement of food production, the promotion of healthier and more content individuals, improved housing, more income, superior transport and communication systems, and the provision of quality education and enlightenment for the populace.

### **Sustainable National Development**

Sustainable national development refers to the advancement aimed at improving individuals within the economy, concurrently fostering national progress, and ensuring that such development is viable over time (Ojinga, 2017). Abubakar (2013) asserts that sustainable national development is a process aimed at enhancing the array of opportunities that empower individuals and communities to realise their aspirations and full potential over an extended duration, while preserving the resilience of economic, social, and environmental systems. Age (2005, as cited in Abubakar, 2013) delineates many objectives that sustainable national development aims to achieve: enhance capital income and employment, fostering human wellbeing by meeting fundamental needs and safeguarding the environment. It denotes the sustainable advancement of the majority of inhabitants in material aspects, certain protection of lives and property, and a

reduction in degrees of inequality within a nation (Idike, 1992, as cited in Nwapi, 2018).

Sustainable national development encompasses all facets of a nation's advancement, including political, social, economic, and technological dimensions. According to Onwuliri and Wey-Amaewhule (2022), it is a dynamic and revolutionary advancement in society. According to Ikwuegbu and Nwaneri (2014), sustainable national development includes economic expansion, changes, and improvements that are intended to raise and preserve the standard of living for the populace. It includes changes in development and expansion, such as social, cultural, and economic shifts. It is a country's ability to improve the social welfare of its citizens. It describes how people grow and develop inside a certain area or system of government (Onwuliri and Wey-Amaewhule, 2022). The organising principle for accomplishing human development goals while maintaining the ability of natural systems to provide the resources and ecosystem services necessary for the economy and society is known as sustainable national development. A society where resource utilisation and living conditions meet human needs without endangering the stability and integrity of natural systems is the ideal state (Mou and

Mou, 2017).

### **Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Nigeria**

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Nigeria is a nine-year educational programme initiated on September 30, 1999, in Sokoto, Sokoto State, by the Federal Republic of Nigeria to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance, and poverty. It was designed as a catalyst to accelerate national advancement, political consciousness, and national unity. Olusegun Obasanjo, the former President of Nigeria, launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme at Sokoto, Sokoto State, as a strategy to achieve Education for All (EFA) and the education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The UBE bill was enacted into law by former President Obasanjo after receiving assent from the National Assembly on May 26, 2004. The UBEA Act delineates provisions for fundamental education, encompassing Early Child Care Education (ECCE), Primary Education, and Junior Secondary Education (Ordui and Nwamadi-Wosu, 2019). Furthermore, a non-formal programme is available to support those who have ceased their schooling (Aboluwodi, 2015; Ordui and Nwamadi-Wosu, 2019).

Universal Basic Education is defined as a fundamental tier of education designed

to fulfill at least the essential learning standards for people. Furthermore, it was underscored that this educational approach constitutes the foundation for sustained lifetime learning (Doggoh, 2014). Amadi and Wodi (2020) define Universal Basic Education (UBE) as comprising early childhood care and education, nine years of formal schooling, adult literacy, non-formal programmes, and educational services for specific populations, including nomads, migrants, girls, women, street children, and individuals with disabilities.

Ogunsanmi and Ibimiluyi (2014) contend that subsequent to the advent of Western education in Nigeria, several policies and initiatives have been instituted to provide education to individuals seeking personal and socio-political growth. These programmes include the establishment of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 and the launch of Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999, primarily designed to provide children and all individuals with essential educational skills to contribute effectively to their communities, society, and the global arena.

The Universal Basic instruction programme offers fundamental instruction. In this context, basic education involves the construction of infrastructure, continuous and

sustainable professional development for educators, and the prioritisation of skills acquisition in primary and secondary education. It ensures the satisfaction of essential educational needs for children and adolescents (Aboluwodi, 2015). Basic education serves as a mechanism for integrating formal, non-formal, and informal educational methodologies and structures to enhance the holistic development of human and capital potentials (Ogunniran et al., 2019).

### **Universal Basic Education (UBE) as a Catalyst for Sustainable Development in Nigeria**

Education and sustainable national development are interconnected and mutually dependent. Development seeks to create or innovate something new or more advanced for society and its members. In contrast, education functions as a catalyst for essential continuous national growth. For sustainable national development, a country such as Nigeria needs qualified personnel, which is crucial for national advancement and can alone be attained through education (Abubakar, 2013). No country, including Nigeria, can attain sustainable national development if a substantial segment of its population remains illiterate (Ibeh and Nwosu, 2021).



An educated populace can attain the skills necessary for sustainable economic development and enhanced quality of life (Abubakar (2013). The aims of UBE include providing basic education that imparts reading, numeracy, and vital life skills for practical living, alongside familiarizing individuals with computer literacy abilities (Onyeze et al., 2017). UBE provides individuals with reading, numeracy, life, and computer skills, empowering them to be productive members of society and promoting sustainable national development. Subsequent to the enactment of universal basic education in Nigeria, there was a notable reduction in the illiteracy rate. Individuals deprived of educational chances favoured their children obtaining an education. The absence of substantial fees and individuals' ability to engage, albeit to a limited extent, in the official language at any time allowed this, hence promoting economic development (Gideon, 2021).

Universal Basic Education seeks to align individual and economic well-being with cultural heritage and environmental conservation, therefore fostering sustainable national development (Nwankwo, 2010). One objective of UBE is to foster a strong awareness of education within the population and a committed dedication to its vigorous

progress. It seeks to provide complimentary, compulsory Universal Basic Education for all Nigerian children of school age (Ordui and Nwamadi-Wosu, 2019). This promotes sustainable national development by creating opportunities that enable children and communities to achieve their aspirations and maximize their potential over time. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) plan mitigates educational disparity by providing free and compulsory education, so affording every child access to learning opportunities (Idike, 1992, as cited in Nwapi, 2018). A decrease in inequality levels facilitates the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 10, which emphasise Gender Equality and the mitigation of disparities.

The 2001 report on Millennium Development Goals (MDG) reveals that over 115 million children of primary school age, primarily girls, were not enrolled in educational institutions. The gender-neutral education of children provided by the UBE aids in poverty reduction and promotes the social and economic progress of the nation. It will also contribute to reducing mortality rates and promoting environmental consciousness. Before the introduction of universal basic education in Nigeria, numerous sections of the country denied children, especially girls, access to schooling.



UNICEF advocates for superior basic education for everyone, emphasising gender equality and the elimination of all types of inequality. Educated women typically marry later, have fewer children, and demonstrate heightened productivity, facilitating their engagement in social, economic, and political domains. UBE promotes gender equality, resulting in reduced poverty, elimination of hunger, and universal access to quality education in Nigeria (Gideon, 2021).

The objectives of UBE encompass guaranteeing continuous access to nine years of free and compulsory formal Universal Basic Education for all school-aged children to promote their contribution to national development; reducing the school dropout rate while improving relevance, quality, and efficiency; prioritizing curriculum diversification to effectively meet individual and community needs and aspirations; realigning and integrating junior secondary education with primary education; and ensuring suitable professional development for educators (Onyeze et al., 2017). These objectives enhance children's access to quality education (Goal 4), which will ultimately result in Well-being (Goal 3), Innovation (Goal 9), and Sustainable Cities and Communities (Goal 11). Mitigating the dropout rate among school-aged children

through the provision of fundamental education will ensure that every citizen attains at least a minimum level of education, thereby facilitating their contribution to the nation's sustainable economic advancement.

Supplementary goals of UBE encompass providing mid-day meals to enhance children's access, retention, and completion of their educational pursuits, alongside promoting community ownership of schools via participation in decision-making processes (Onyeze, et al., 2017). By providing meals to enhance children's access, retention, and completion of their educational journey, Universal Basic Education thereby promotes the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 2, which is 'zero hunger.' By attaining zero hunger, children gain essential knowledge and skills through the UBE programme, so augmenting their capacity to positively impact society. Moreover, cultivating community ownership of schools by engaging in decision-making processes fosters a sense of belonging that Universal Basic Education (UBE) instills in the local community. This also promotes substantial community engagement in the educational programme, ultimately leading to sustainable communities (goal 11).

The fundamental education programme is expected to provide youth with

cognitive skills, competencies, and dispositions that will promote their future progress within their communities (Adeyemi, 2007, as cited in Gideon, 2021). Children with this perspective, skill set, and attitude ultimately develop into adults capable of launching entrepreneurial companies, so developing self-reliance and becoming good employers. This consistently leads to a reduction in poverty and hunger within the nation's populace. This would promote the attainment of sustainable development goals, including Well-being (Goal 3), Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (Goal 9), and Responsible Consumption and Production (Goal 12). Thus, the successful implementation of UBE will eradicate illiteracy, a persistent problem in the nation (Arhedo et al., 2009, as cited in Gideon, 2021). UBE is a powerful instrument for social, economic, and cultural transformation crucial for achieving national goals, aims, and objectives (Gideon, 2021).

The principal aim of the UBE programme is to furnish free basic education to school-aged children in Nigeria within a nine-year period. The strategy aims to adopt strategies to rectify regional disparities in fundamental education across the country, eradicate illiteracy and poverty, and foster national development, political

consciousness, and national unity. The UBE programmer presents Nigeria's strategy for achieving Education for All (EFA) and the education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Gideon, 2021). UBE is an effective tool for eradicating poverty and fostering economic development. It establishes the fundamental foundation upon which the majority of individuals' economic and social well-being is constructed and cultivated. The foundational education provided by UBE is crucial for substantial progress in economic and social development (Wani et al., 2022).

### **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that universal basic education (UBE), which provides foundational education to meet individuals' minimum learning requirements, is essential for sustainable national growth. This form of instruction has been demonstrated to be the cornerstone of sustainable lifelong learning. It encompasses early childhood education, nine years of formal schooling, adult literacy, non-formal programmes, and the education of certain demographics, including nomads, migrants, girls, women, street children, and individuals with disabilities. This educational initiative thus encompasses a significant segment of the Nigerian populace, providing each

individual with the opportunity to acquire essential literacy and numeracy skills, thereby enhancing their utility and contributing to economic development.

### Recommendations

This paper, therefore, recommends the following:

1. The Government should regularly send quality assurance officers to various schools to ensure that the UBE programme is properly implemented. For without proper implementation, the goals and objectives of the programme would not be actualized;
2. The Government should also ensure that funds are given to the programme to ensure that the programme does not suffer any limitation or setbacks due to inadequacy of funds for the successful running of the programme; and
3. All hands should be on deck in ensuring that the challenges of the UBE

programme are properly tackled. UBE is not the first programme of this type but a product of the first programme that was not properly planned and managed. Therefore, proper planning and management is required to make the UBE programme successful in contributing to sustainable national development.

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